

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF PREDETERMINED STRIKE TEAMS IN
CLARK COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

Executive Development

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ABSTRACT

This research project analyzed the use of predetermined strike teams within the fire and emergency services. The problem was there are no predetermined strike teams in Clark County. The purpose of this applied research paper was to develop a list of predetermined strike teams in Clark County.

This research employed both historical and action research (a) to identify if there are any national standards for strike teams, (b) under what circumstances would specific strike teams be used, and (c) to identify the local available resources (both personnel and equipment). The principle procedure employed was a review of available literature. A survey was also administered to determine the local available resources. Several interviews were also conducted to gauge the willingness of the agencies to participate in this concept.

The results of this project identified the Incident Command System as the national standard for strike teams. Also identified were numerous types of incidents that would cause a strike team to be used, including nearly every type of incident that would overwhelm local available resources. Finally, a table was developed identifying all of the available resources that could be compiled into strike teams.

The recommendations resulting from this research included the adoption of the eight recommended strike teams by the Clark County Fire Chiefs Association, the formulation of a plan for training them, and the sharing of the concept with the Washington State Association of Fire Chiefs.

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INTRODUCTION

The thirteen fire departments in Clark County, Washington have faced a multitude of large incidents within recent years that have threatened both life and property within the county and in other parts of the state (under the state mobilization act). Although all of the departments have mutual aid agreements, there is a significant time delay in mobilizing multiple resources together for use on large incidents. Since the majority of the departments in Clark County are small and unable to mobilize an entire strike team alone, cooperation between jurisdictions is necessary to meet the needs both within the county and statewide. Furthermore, when these strike teams are put together, they are usually a mixture of personnel who are unfamiliar with each other and have little if any experience working together.

The problem is that there are no predetermined strike teams in Clark County. The purpose of this applied research paper is to develop a list of predetermined strike teams in Clark County. The historical and action research methods were employed to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any national standards for strike teams?
2. What circumstances would cause specific strike teams to be used?
3. What are the local available resources (both personnel and equipment)?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In 1986, all of the fire departments in Clark County, Washington adopted the NIIMS Incident Command System (ICS) for use on all types of emergencies. Since then, all of the departments have been successful in using this system for managing every type of incident, from small medical incidents to large-scale conflagration fires. In 1992, in the wake of the Spokane “Firestorm” in October 1991, the Washington State Legislature directed the creation of a Washington State Fire Services Resource Mobilization Plan (Washington State Military Department, 1995). Under this Mobilization Plan, strike teams (as defined by ICS) were to be the main component of aid given to areas affected by fires, earthquakes, and other large-scale disasters. These strike teams would be assembled from departments in other areas of the state for assistance in the area(s) affected by an incident.

Since 1992, the state has averaged five mobilization fires per year. Concurrently, the fire departments in Clark County have participated in mobilization fires on an average of 2.3 times per year (Yager, 1999). When mobilized, the teams from Clark County are often delayed for numerous reasons. From each department seeking out the appropriate “certified” personnel (internally), to identifying which apparatus to send, the county fire departments have been slow to put together the appropriate resources. The result is that the Incident Commander(s) of the fires that requested the resources must be forced to change/alter their plans due to the significant delay in response.

The trend in the future will be to utilize strike teams on a more regular basis for large scale emergencies (Yager, 1999). With the development of predetermined strike teams, the response time will be shortened, teams will have trained together and be familiar with each other,

thus providing a superior level of service to not only other parts of the state, but also within the county when the need arises. This superior level of service dovetails perfectly with the emphasis on service quality that is taught in the Executive Development course at the National Fire Academy. Ultimately the goal of these predetermined strike teams is to provide a higher quality product/level of service, to the citizens we serve.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the United States today, nearly every fire department has adopted the Incident Command System for use on emergency scenes. Originally developed as an answer to the problem of the large wildland fires that occurred in the 1970's, ICS has grown to become a management system which allows different agencies to work toward a "common goal in an effective and efficient manner" (Carlson, 1984). As a scene management tool, ICS is an "all risk" operating system that can be adapted to fit any type and size of incident, based on it's particular needs (Mason, 1995).

Recognizing the importance of well trained and experienced people to fill key incident positions management positions within ICS, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) developed the concept of predesignated incident management or overhead teams. Consequently, "for years, wildland fire agencies have managed complex forest fires using predesignated, multi-agency incident management teams" (Teie, 1994). Thus it can be concluded that if predesignated overhead teams are successful, then predesignated strike teams should also be successful.

In San Mateo County California, predesignated strike teams have been used for

many years with much success. According to R.L. Nailen, 14 separate cities blend indistinguishably into each other, presenting every kind of fire and rescue hazard from high rises to large urban interface areas. Under this environment, the various fire departments and the California Division of Forestry have developed predesignated strike teams to handle any type of large-scale incident.

In Minnesota, fire departments have identified the need to preplan as a way to deal with wildland interface fires (Leschak, 1994). Their plan includes many components of ICS including Unified Command, preordained and preassigned radio frequencies, and prepositioning and predetermination of strike teams. According to Leschak, for a plan to be fully effective, it must be rehearsed and practiced. Dozens of large and small agencies have adopted preplanned teams and exercise them on a regular basis to keep them in a ready state to handle these large-scale disasters.

While ICS was born out of large-scale wildland fires, it has been adopted to meet needs on all types of incidents. Thus, strike teams are not just for use on wildland incidents. A portion of the National Defense Authorization Act of 1997 says: "The threat posed to citizens of the United States by nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical weapons delivered by unconventional means is significant and growing." After studying this issue, congress concluded that emergency personnel are not adequately prepared or trained for incidents of this type. In Japan, 10% of the first responders to the sarin gas attack in 1995 were contaminated and thousands of citizens were not decontaminated at all. Therefore, Congress has passed legislation called Nunn-Lugar II. This legislation gives the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Human Services (HHS), the Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA) and the FBI the role in creation of a domestic preparedness plan. Models have been created for Metropolitan Medical Strike Force Teams (MMSTs) and mobile NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) disaster medical assistance teams. Arlington County, just outside Washington D.C. was the first pilot for the MMST program. The Arlington County pilot program has 129 people on the MMST consisting of fire service, EMS, physicians, nurses, and law enforcement. Metro Washington's MMST became fully operational in June 1997. The goal is to have such strike teams in the country's 100 largest cities within five years (Ludwig, 1997).

Eisner (1995) in his evaluation of the Washington State mobilization plan identified the need to have predesignated strike teams and task forces. He based this on previous events such as the Spokane firestorm in 1991 and the Central Washington fires of 1994. Identified as weak links in the state mobilization process were: slow mobilization times, untrained teams, and teams unfamiliar with each other. These identified problems could be overcome with predetermined strike teams.

However, the predesignated strike team concept is not without some shortcomings. The opportunities for teams to actually work together and gain experience are sometimes "extremely rare" (LeBlanc, 1987). Additionally, the financing of off-season training sessions might be difficult to come by in light of current financial problems (Mason, 1999).

PROCEDURES

Methodology

Research primarily involved historical research through a review of literature from the Learning Resources Center of the National Fire Academy and the library at Clark County Fire

District No. 11. Additionally, several Chief Officers were interviewed in regards to this project and its potential impacts on the fire service in Clark County.

Action research was also used in that the information gathered was applied to develop the list of predetermined strike teams. A survey was conducted of all the fire departments in Clark County to determine the availability of resources in the event of a state or local mobilization. The survey was distributed to the designated person in charge of operations at each of the 13 fire departments in Clark County. 100% of the surveys were returned. This information was utilized to create the draft list of predetermined strike teams.

Assumptions and Limitations

The procedures used to complete this research project were based on three assumptions. First, it is assumed that all authors included in the literature review performed objective and unbiased research in the preparation of their work. Second, it is assumed that the state of Washington does not intend to abandon its current state mobilization plan. The list developed as a result of this project relies on the state mobilization plan for its full effectiveness. Finally, it is assumed that each of the respondents to the survey answered honestly and completely to the best of their knowledge. Additionally, all of the respondents would need to adopt and agree to the list for it to be implemented.

The limitations that affected this research project included time, changing priorities of the various fire departments in Clark County, and its limited scope/size. To be more effective, this concept should be addressed on a larger, regional basis.

Definition of Terms

Incident Commander: The individual who is in overall command of an incident pursuant to the local jurisdictions Incident Command System.

Incident Command System: An organized system of roles, responsibilities, and procedures used to manage incidents.

NIIMS: The National Interagency Incident Management System. This was a result of the FIREScope Program in California. This system consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications.

Strike Team: A combination of five like kind and type apparatus with personnel (according to ICS guidelines). These are under the direction of a strike team leader and have common communications.

Unified Command: Where two or more agencies with jurisdictional responsibility share in the command role.

RESULTS

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. Are there any national standards for strike teams?

Although there are several different Incident Management systems available, the system used by most fire departments in this country is the Incident Command System (ICS). Since all organizations within Clark County and the State of Washington have adopted the ICS, this is the

system of choice. ICS identifies the minimum standards for a strike team as follows: A combination of five like kind and type apparatus with personnel, a strike team leader, and common communications (Carlson, 1984).

Research Question 2. What circumstances would cause specific strike teams to be used?

Although the use of strike teams began in the wildland arena, the use of them has spread to include nearly every type of emergency incident. Although the state of Washington has only used strike teams on wildland incidents, the mobilization plan states that strike teams can be used for any type of incident that overwhelms the local resources. Although this list is comprehensive, it is not all-inclusive:

- Wildland fires
- Structure fires
- High rise fires
- Earthquakes
- Terrorist activities
- Hazardous materials incidents
- Multi-casualty incidents
- Volcanic eruptions
- Severe weather incidents

Research Questions 3. What are the local available resources (both personnel and equipment)?

Below is a chart based on the responses given in the survey. These numbers in combination with discussions with local Chief officers, were the primary source of guidance in compiling the predetermined strike teams in Appendix “A”. All of the Chief Officers interviewed appeared willing to adopt a plan to utilize predetermined strike teams for local and state mobilizations. Based on the resources available in Clark County, only the following types of equipment and personnel were surveyed.

Organization	Type 1 Engines	Type 5 Engines	Trucks/ Ladder Co	Water Tenders	Medic Units
CCFD #1	3	1	0	1	0
CCFD #2	1	1	0	1	0
CCFD #3	3	4	0	3	0
CCFD #6	9	1	1	0	0
CCFD #9	4	1	0	1	0
CCFD #10	8	5	0	3	0
CCFD #11	5	2	1	1	1
CCFD #12	5	1	0	2	0
CCFD #13	3	1	0	1	4
Camas FD	3	0	1	0	3
Vancouver FD	12	2	3	2	2
Washougal FD	3	1	1	0	0

DISCUSSION

The list of recommended predetermined strike teams (Appendix “A”), which represents the results of this research, would allow the fire departments in Clark County to match the positive results found in the literature review. The various authors all cite the benefits of having these predetermined teams in place. The benefits include faster response times, experienced

teams, and a higher level of service quality. These benefits closely match the curriculum of the Executive Development course at the National Fire Academy.

As expected, the national standard for strike teams was found in the Incident Command System (ICS). This corresponds perfectly with the adoption of ICS by both the state of Washington and the local fire departments. ICS has numerous proven advantages over previously used systems and has been tested and refined over the last two decades.

The situations where these strike teams could be used are varied and include just about every type of imaginable incident that could have the potential to overwhelm local resources. With predetermined strike teams, the local agencies (and the state) have the ability to rapidly respond to nearly any type of incident in an expedient manner. With the federal government predicting a higher percentage of large-scale disasters in the future, these teams would meet the needs of the citizens we serve.

In discussions with local fire chiefs, there seemed to be a willingness to adopt the concept of predetermined strike teams. There is a sense of frustration by the chiefs in regards to the historical delays in mobilizing the resources when requested. They did however, express a concern for the funding of the training of these teams. They felt that money was not currently available for this and that the training division (of the County Fire Chiefs Association) should investigate the possibility of the members volunteering their time to participate in training sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. The operations division of the Clark County Fire Chiefs Association should take Appendix “A” and utilize it as a starting point for discussions on the possible implementation of predetermined strike teams in Clark County. Once this division has approved a final list, it should be forwarded to the Fire Chiefs for final approval and implementation.

Recommendation 2. Once approved, the Fire Chiefs should direct the training division to formulate a plan for initial and ongoing training of these strike teams. This plan should be developed with costs in mind as it may take several years before ongoing continued training may occur.

Recommendation 3. If successful in full implementation, this plan should be taken to the Washington State Association of Fire Chiefs so that other counties/regions may incorporate a similar plan if desired.

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APPENDIX A

Recommended Strike Teams for Clark County, Washington

Clark County Type 1 Engine Strike Team #1

- Strike Team Leader – B/C Michael Ciraulo
- Engine 8-1-1
- Engine 11-1-1
- Engine 12-2
- Engine 3-3
- Engine 6-1-1

Clark County Type 1 Engine Strike Team #2

- Strike Team Leader – B/C Tom Militich
- Engine 8-7
- Engine 9-2
- Engine 17-2
- Engine 4-2
- Engine 1-2

Clark County Type 1 Engine Strike Team #3

- Strike Team Leader – D/C Scott Sorenson
- Engine 3-3
- Engine 8-3

- Engine 6-2
- Engine 10-3
- Engine 13-1

Clark County Type 5 Engine Strike Team #1

- Strike Team Leader – D/C Tim Dawdy
- B-11-1
- B-8-8
- SQ 3-4
- SQ 17-1
- B-11-4

Clark County Type 5 Engine Strike Team #2

- Strike Team Leader – A/C Dan Yager
- B-8-9
- B-6-1
- SQ-10-5
- SQ-4-1
- B-11-1

Clark County Type 1 Tender Strike Team #1

- Strike Team Leader – D/C Donovan Mattern
- WT-11-1

- WT-3-1
- WT-8-5
- WT-10-4
- WT-12-2

Clark County Truck Strike Team #1

- Strike Team Leader – Captain Kevin Griffiee
- T-8-2
- T-6-1
- T-11-3
- T-4-1
- T-8-5

Clark County Medic Strike Team #1

- Strike Team Leader – B/C Dennis Walker
- M-11-3
- M-4-1
- NCEMS 1
- NCEMS 2
- AMR 16-3

APPENDIX B

July 15, 1999

Dear Chief _____:

I am writing to ask for your assistance in a research project that I am conducting for a class at the National Fire Academy. I am currently enrolled in the Academy's "Executive Fire Officer Program". As part of this four-year program, a research project is required following the completion of each course.

The subject I have chosen for my project is The Development of Predetermined Strike Teams in Clark County, Washington. To assist me in this effort I am asking that you take a few moments to fill out the enclosed survey.

In compiling the survey instrument, I have tried to make it as least time consuming as possible. A stamped and self-addressed envelope is enclosed for return of the survey. Please return the survey as soon as possible.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Ciraulo, Battalion Chief
Clark County Fire District No. 11

Encl.

Appendix C

Survey

The following is a list of specific types of equipment or personnel. Please list the number of each type of resources that your district would have available for use in the event of a state mobilization or other large-scale disaster.

Number of Type 1 Engines _____

Number of Type 5 Engines _____

Number of Ladder/Truck Companies _____

Number of Medic Units _____

Number of Water Tenders _____

Number of Strike Team Leaders _____